

OUTSIDE, LOOKING IN: THE REPRESENTATIVE  
AESTHETIC OF INCOMPLETION IN  
*WUTHERING HEIGHTS*

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**ABSTRACT.** This paper analyzes the human being's uneasy posture on the fringe of the natural setting, in order to illustrate the aesthetic implied by mankind's uncertain exclusion from its apparent peace. This consideration, as represented in Emily Brontë's novel *Wuthering Heights*, originates in an early scene portraying the central characters, Heathcliff and Catherine, standing in a flower-plot in the outer darkness, gazing through a window with equal longing and scorn, at the domestic splendor and seeming comfort they witness within. The characters' response to their position highlights their conflicting desire for both safety in the home and liberty in the wild. This analysis explores both the presence of this conflated desire in the Romantic literature and ideology prior to Brontë's time and the implications resultant from the Victorian's subsequent writing and scientific discovery, epitomized by evolutionary theory. Such considerations produce two conflicting views of humanity's position in relation to nature, either outside it or wholly within it. This paper argues a third option, present in the characters' initial yet unobserved stance in the flower-plot beneath their feet. Fundamental to this discussion is the inherent uncertainty of the Gothic aesthetic that pervades Brontë's novel, characterized by this neglected garden and the incomplete but satisfactory aesthetic it represents.

**KEY WORDS:** aesthetic, representative, gardening, outside, gothic

**Introduction**

The primary tension expressed in Emily Brontë's gothic novel *Wuthering Heights* first takes shape when central characters Catherine and Heathcliff stand together in a flower-plot beneath the drawing-room window of Thrushcross Grange, a fine estate which stands opposed to the children's residence at Wuthering Heights. The young Heathcliff describes the scene he observes from his vantage outside the window: "The light came from thence; they had not put up the shutters, and the curtains were only half closed. Both of us were able to look in by standing on the basement, and clinging to the ledge, and we saw—ah! it was beautiful" (Brontë, 2007: 74). Heathcliff goes on to describe a luxurious vision of domestic splendor, tainted only by the spoiled and embattled siblings currently inhabiting this

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homely paradise. His description of the place concludes with marked longing, envy, and scorn: “We should have thought ourselves in heaven!” This statement epitomizes the many references to paradise throughout Brontë’s text. The characters’ preoccupation with an ideal place for humanity contrasts with the story’s overwhelmingly gloomy atmosphere, as well as its painfully realistic portrayal of domestic decay and familial unrest. Through this contrast, Brontë artfully belies an illusory Romantic aesthetic (illusory when taken literally) while portraying the intolerable sorrows of a harsher, realer one (harsh when robbed of its representative aspects). Heathcliff’s and Catherine’s position, standing in the dark outside the window and looking in at the light from the hearth, initiates the pervasive unrest at the heart of the novel’s literary design. Heathcliff’s simultaneous longing and scorn indicates to readers a fundamental aspect of humanity.

Both the hearth light and the outer dark appear as universal metaphors throughout the literary canon, from *Beowulf* to *King Lear*. The Bible generates this archetype through its frequent use of light and dark metaphors. In the Gospel of Matthew, Christ speaks of a people excluded from the Kingdom of Heaven, cast “into the outer darkness”, where “there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth” (Matt. 8:12, English Standard Version). Heathcliff and Catherine inhabit a similar place and their response to their exclusion is identical. They long for the comfort they see within, hating those who enjoy it. Brontë, perhaps surprisingly, seeks to draw the reader into her story primarily through these two desperate characters. Their situation points to a root state of banishment, felt in all branches of human life. Yet, while it draws its central metaphor from Scripture, *Wuthering Heights* chooses a more earthly path of inquiry. Brontë cleverly translates her story of humanity into a clear distinction between Man and Nature, responding to the nature-obsessed Romantic Movement before her while highlighting in her Gothic prose the robust, free uncertainty of mankind’s progress in taming wild nature. By juxtaposing these two flawed aesthetics, Brontë indicates a third—one that is better, even perfect, and yet still incomplete. With patience and slow wisdom, along with a vital dose of common sense, the author dismisses the deceptive promise of the apparent “inside” for the greater splendor of a finished and a furnished home beyond humanity’s perception. *Wuthering Heights* identifies a powerful uneasiness arising from the human presence in the natural setting, expressed in the characters’ desire to be “in” when they find themselves decidedly “out”, proposing a solution through nature’s incomplete and representative beauty, found in the flower-plot beneath their feet.

Introduced in this early scene, the novel’s central tension between the homely and the natural—the tamed and the wild—continues to spark throughout the text. Two key observations from this passage dictate the

story's portrait of humanity. First, the exterior setting beyond the window, where Heathcliff and Catherine stand, is dark. In response to this outer darkness, both children develop a keen desire to be "inside", included in the circle of light from the hearth, while knowing they are decidedly "outside". Second, both resolutely plant themselves in the Linton's flower-plot beneath the window, an observation reserved for the end of this analysis. Indeed, the majority of this novel spends itself in barrenness and shadow; the reader must wait for spring as it appears only in the final pages. An analysis of this Gothic darkness must account for its insistent primality in the text. *Wuthering Heights* is not limited to its contemporary culture and time. The novel's portrayal of humanity in nature—that is, in the "outside"—highlights a position of banishment from proper human community, as felt by the individual, extending beyond readings of Heathcliff's alien identity as an orphaned gypsy child. The force of the novel's symbolism requires a reading that reaches past cultural considerations of race and class to the universal qualities of human existence. While Brontë does address the social problems of her own time period, as well as drawing from the poetry and idealism of the prior Romantic literary period, her individual and personal creative design strikes a chord at the heart of every person. She possesses a singularly painful imagination. Expressions of mankind's fundamental feeling of exclusion are unlimited in application. Likewise, the solution to these issues depends on universal symbolism for its poignancy, requiring in turn an equally broad interpretation of the initial problem. These two observations, therefore, must be felt by the reader un-distanced from the past.

### **The domesticated nature**

An interested reader does not have to look far before realizing that the distinction between "in" and "out", as perceived by Heathcliff and Catherine, is illusory. Both locations are blurred and problematic. The issue, therefore, lies not in the outward constructions of home and nature, but rather in the inward perceptions of one's place in relation to these constructions. If distinctions between the inner and the outer are inherently faulty, they provide an ultimately unreliable solace to the individual who inhabits either one of them. Emily Rena-Dozier, in her article "Gothic Criticisms: *Wuthering Heights* and Nineteenth-Century Literary History" (2010) brings this to bear on the historical figure of the author, Emily Brontë. In her analysis of Victorian conceptions of the domestic and the Gothic in literature, Rena-Dozier points to the pervasiveness of darker Gothic sensations within the domestic realm. "*Wuthering Heights*", she posits, "...carefully breaks down this opposition between gothic and domestic modes by illustrating the ways in which the domestic is predicated on acts of violence" (Rena-Dozier, 2010:

760). Drawing her evidence from an anecdote concerning Emily Brontë's discipline of a vicious pet dog, Rena-Dozier writes: "Emily Brontë appears in nineteenth-century literary history as part of a story about dogs and violence, disturbing the idea of domestic tranquility by highlighting the violent traumas required by the enforcement of domestication" (Rena-Dozier, 2010: 770). Examining the portrayal of dogs as household pets in *Wuthering Heights*, Rena-Dozier goes on to articulate, "Where we would expect to find a contrast drawn between gothic and domestic, between Heights and Grange, we find instead that the two are more similar than they are different—that the domestic space is as affiliated with violence as the gothic" (Rena-Dozier, 2010: 772). The behavior of the children inside Thrushcross Grange, witnessed by Heathcliff and Catherine from their place outside the window, supports Rena-Dozier's assertion. The spoiled pair tug viciously at opposite ends of an unfortunate pet dog.

Therefore, the domestic splendor Heathcliff observes through the window can be read as an unattainable illusion. Indeed, as Rena-Dozier's article implies, the progress of the novel portrays a domestic space devoid of the safety it is supposed to provide. Two views of nature arise from this conflation of Gothic and domestic—that is, the presence of human perception applied to the natural setting. In one, nature promises freedom from the necessity to constrain, which might be understood as perfected domesticity (nature as a garden). Nature, from this standpoint, represents warmth, comfort, and serenity to its inhabitants. This is a more Romantic view of nature, offering peace in solitude to contemplative individuals wandering its expanses. Here the human being can be free. However, this is not the nature one finds portrayed in *Wuthering Heights*. The first description one reads of the house bearing that name describes a nature broken by continual storms: "...one may guess the power of the north wind, blowing over the edge, by the excessive slant of a few, stunted firs at the end of the house; and by a range of gaunt thorns all stretching their limbs one way, as if craving alms of the sun" (Brontë, 2007: 6). While the Gothic qualities of the novel prevent overly Romantic concepts of nature, Brontë does include this perspective in the second volume of the novel, expressed through the second Catherine, the former's daughter, who romantically desires to explore the rustic landscape beyond Penistone Craggs, which she can see from her window (inside, looking out). The darker landscape that pervades the novel does not contradict her perception, but rather emphasizes the naivety of it. It cannot be trusted as a literal relief from suffering.

The contrasting view of nature admits to its inherent violence and thus the necessity of domestication. From this perspective, nature can be tamed and controlled, and must be in order to ensure safety (nature as wild). The story's focus on the boundaries formed by the houses themselves implies an

effort to repulse nature's storms. The second thing we learn about *Wuthering Heights* is its sturdy, stony structure: "Happily, the architect had foresight to build it strong: the narrow windows are deeply set in the wall, and the corners defended with large jutting stones" (Brontë, 2007: 6). Here the human being can be safe. Yet the house described, with its narrow windows and fortress walls, seems decidedly dark, like the nature it stands against. Here, one begins to comprehend a fundamental failure of human endeavors. One perspective flees the darkness in pursuit of fairy sun-light, the other multiplies the shadows in defense of cheery hearth-light. Both desires originate and exist simultaneously in the human consciousness confronting nature. The conclusion then is a conflation of two seemingly opposite desires in the human individual: to be at once free and contained in nature.

This paradoxical desire marks a pivotal consideration of the literature spanning the Romantic and Victorian periods, of which Brontë is very well aware. The late-Romantic poet John Keats captures it best in his famous "Ode to a Grecian Urn." Conflicting human desire lies at the heart of this poem, as the poet gazes at an ancient Grecian urn and the lively figures depicted on it. His poem moves from silence to noise in the first stanza, emphasizing the urns contrasting qualities of actual serenity and painted jubilation. Keats words it this way: "Heard melodies are sweet, but those unheard/Are sweeter" (Keats, 1976: 209). The melody he cannot hear yet still intuits from the urn's art might be related to the light described above, whether sun or hearth. The poet knows the melodies he can hear will fade into obscurity and darkness, as all mortal effort does; while the melodies he cannot hear must remain unheard, and so neither accessed nor enjoyed. "Ode to a Grecian Urn" poses a crucial question and cannot give an answer: which is best, real light that will not last, or lasting light that is not real? Both options seem undesirable, according to the simultaneous and opposite desire of the human heart.

Brontë, well versed in this debate and exceedingly knowledgeable on the subject of the human heart, illustrates exactly Keats' dilemma in the character Catherine and her love for two men, Heathcliff and Edgar Linton. Catherine describes her feelings as follows: "My love for Linton is like the foliage in the woods. Time will change it, I'm well aware, as winter changes the trees—my love for Heathcliff resembles the eternal rocks beneath—a source of little visible delight, but necessary" (Brontë, 2007: 94-95). In this passage, Catherine unwittingly admits the inherent failure of her very human desires. She longs for nature-as-garden, or Romantic domesticity, in the character of Linton, all the while knowing it will pass away. She yearns also for nature-as-wild, or Gothic liberty, in her childhood companion Heathcliff, still well aware of his stony qualities. The one offers the comfort of constraint; the other the exhilaration of freedom. Both fail to satisfy.

Therefore, the prevalent darkness of the novel results from the actual absence of either light, sun and hearth. Brontë employs a universal paradox of human desire to illustrate in *Wuthering Heights* the shadowy, Gothic quality of human satisfaction in earthly things, perceiving in nature two opposing lights we cannot possess. From this opposition, Brontë builds her aesthetic. It appears first in the plausible character of Catherine, with whom we easily relate, but focuses on the more fictional Heathcliff, in whom the hidden darkness of the human spirit is expressed. Catherine's passing from the novel comes as no surprise. Through her we access the faulty desire. Brontë then turns to the universal reality of Heathcliff, in whom the desire is condemned.

In the scene at the window, Heathcliff inhabits a place not dictated by a contrast between home and the wild, but rather a position which confuses these two views of nature from the vantage point of a presupposed habitation in the nature's wilderness. Feeling already excluded from domestic harmony, Heathcliff enters the wild in order to make something of himself, an excursion at once liberating yet also requiring supreme control. His movement into nature initiates a pattern of exiting the community in order to reassert oneself more resolutely into it. In this way, Heathcliff's exile—articulated in the novel as his disappearance from *Wuthering Heights* and subsequent reappearance as the powerful figure who controls the rest of the story—is self-inflicted. William Wordsworth's "Lines Left upon a Seat in a Yew-tree" illustrates exactly this self-inflicted banishment and the singularly tragic consciousness it produces. In the poem, Wordsworth aims at entrance back into community. The setting of the poem is "far from all human dwelling" (Wordsworth, 1999: 30), commanding a view of wild nature from a seat in a yew-tree. The fictional character in Wordsworth's poem has "taught this aged tree,/ Now wild, to bend its arms in circling shade..." and once sat upon the seat he made where "these gloomy boughs/ Had charms for him..." where "lifting up his head, he then would gaze/ On the more distant scene..." (Wordsworth, 1999: 31). Here Wordsworth captures a perspective conspicuously outside, looking in.

The character's shaping of the tree, bending its arms to shade the seat, captures the capacity of the gardener to tame nature, but also nature's untamable power to destroy the character's creation. Where, at the end of the poem, Wordsworth declares "[t]rue dignity abides with him alone/ Who, in the silent hour of inward thought,/ Can still suspect, and still revere himself,/ In lowliness of heart", he also warns, "[t]he man whose eye/ Is ever on himself, doth look on one,/ The least of nature's works...". Wordsworth recognizes a necessity to fashion one's identity in inward thought, inspired by isolation in nature's wilderness, while cautioning against a tendency never to re-enter the community. The desire to remain in nature is predicated

on the individual's sense of control over nature and a self-assertion which claims a kind of peripheral center of the individual consciousness—shaped by the bent boughs of the tree—opposed to the perceived center of the community. The poem serves as a fitting emblem of Heathcliff's project in the novel, by which he tries to assert himself over the domestic splendor he perceives in the Linton home. Since domestic harmony is already illusory, Heathcliff must establish himself as the center from which he has felt excluded, which entails a breaking down of all previous centers.

Having entered nature, Heathcliff never leaves it, acting instead as if he wields its force. In order to assert himself against the perceived domestic splendor that excludes him, he *becomes* nature itself, imitating nature's self-containment in order to exclude all other centers from his own peripheral one. After his return in the novel, Heathcliff sets about breaking down those barriers which he feels once barred his way. However, in a summary of his actions, after his energy has been expended, he confesses, "It is a poor conclusion...an absurd termination to my violent exertions! I get levers and mattocks to demolish the two houses, and train myself to be capable of working like Hercules, and when everything is ready, and in my power I find the will to lift a slate off either roof has vanished! My old enemies have not beaten me..." (Brontë, 2007: 300). Indeed, Heathcliff's old enemies have not beaten him, but rather his presumed ally, nature. At the end of the novel, the wild power of nature continues Heathcliff's work—as it has all along. Lockwood, the character to whom Heathcliff's narrative is told, walks to the kirk and observes the graveyard in which Heathcliff is buried: "I perceived decay had made progress, even in seven months—many a window showed black gaps deprived of glass; and slates jutted off, here and there, beyond the right line of the roof, to be gradually worked off in coming autumn storms" (Brontë, 2007: 312). Two significant portions of Heathcliff's labor—the breaking of windows which keep him out and the symbolic lifting of the roof from off the houses—are accomplished by nature's untamable power. His attempt at being wild ultimately fails. Where Wordsworth might advocate a synthesis with nature, Heathcliff sees himself inevitably inhabiting nature's outer darkness, *being* nature in order to avoid exclusion.

### **The Controlled Nature**

Heathcliff's initial position in this darkness, despite his failure to live up to its persistent force, offers a significant interpretation of the presumption of the domestic construction. In his childish approach to the Linton home, Heathcliff plants himself resolutely in the flower-plot—that is, the garden—beneath the window. His actions are already driven towards the destruction of the rival family's attempt at order in nature. Gardens represent control over nature and an enclosure in which nature is contained and tamed. A

garden is exclusive, based on the containment of a safe dose of nature within a realm small enough to be cultivated by human hands. Symbolically, a garden is both safe and free. Heathcliff, excluded from the metaphoric domestic garden (the control of which, as delineated above, slips through the fingers of the gardener), tramples the actual garden under his childish feet in an early attempt at exhibiting the unruly force of wild nature.

Heathcliff's failure to carry out his wild pursuit, however, bears witness to humanity's confounded place in nature. The self-contained quality of nature—its appearance of being both wild and at peace—represents a habitation in the unattainable place that the human individual desires. A person cannot inhabit nature because a person is not of nature—that is, its force is not ours. The recognition that this place is exclusive to humanity inspires the project of domestication which provides an imperfect imitation of nature's wild sanctity. Real gardens illustrate this domestication, enclosing manageable nature and thus attaining a perceived place of containment. Indeed, the novel's final resolution relies on the cultivation of an actual garden by the second Cathy, Catherine's daughter. Kept at Wuthering Heights by Heathcliff, Cathy sets about training Hareton in both literacy and manners. Hareton is the son of Hindley, Heathcliff's adopted brother, and is therefore the true heir to the Wuthering Heights estate. Cathy's successful redemption of Hareton, who has been neglected and left illiterate by Heathcliff, restores order to the house. Her first action in this endeavor, with Hareton's help, is to restore, arrange, and tend the estate's decayed garden. Yet according to Catherine's faulty desire and Heathcliff's failed enterprise, this solution should not seem to work. A garden represents exactly humanity's conflated and unattainable desire. Only through an acceptance of this problematic position and a careful observation of its implications can the image take on its representative significance. Honest humility and patience—the creeds of common sense throughout the text—enliven the garden's aesthetic meaning. For this reason, both children, steeped in their longing and scorn, miss the flower-plot beneath their feet.

In order to understand the garden's representative aesthetic, its real effectuality must be called into question. Only by understanding the gaps of a garden—indeed, the garden takes on its deepest meaning as an environment in which human limitation is conspicuously displayed—can one appreciate its efficacy as a balm to mankind's broken wishes. A garden constructs a forced containment, still subject to the failures of any house and the violence of every storm. As much as it is a synthesis of conflicting desires, a human garden must also be a place of domestic uncertainty and the wild assertions of nature. A human garden is neither the free garden of nature nor a perfect enclosure; both/and quickly becomes neither/nor. For this reason, the garden at the end of *Wuthering Heights* must be representative,

as the novel itself comes to symbolize universal truths of humanity. A reading that fails to see the final garden as a glimpse of mankind's original position in creation, a representation that only *indicates* the solitary hope of satisfaction available to human kind, which only human evil corrupts and makes incomplete, such a reading must also fail to see any light at all in the story. This imperfect indication of perfection stands as the only joy offered in a plot that is exceedingly (and plausibly) dark. Without the garden's representative significance, one still finds evil, but this time without hope. Even so, Heathcliff stands obliviously in the Linton's flower-plot, gazing at the scene he takes for Heaven instead of the true earth beneath his feet.

Many readers of *Wuthering Heights* make a similar mistake, with their eye on an identical false paradise. Interestingly, Brontë includes in her novel a rebuke of those who do not learn from books. The first sign of Catherine's fatal self-absorption comes from her use of books: "Catherine's library was select; and its state of dilapidation proved it to have been well used, though not altogether for a legitimate purpose; scarcely one chapter had escaped a pen-and-ink commentary—at least, the appearance of one, covering every morsel of blank that the printer had left. Some were detached sentences; other parts took the form of a regular diary..." (Brontë, 2007: 25). Rather than reading, interpreting, and learning from her books, Catherine uses them to record the intricacies of her own suffering. She focuses on the violence she endures in her broken domestic setting. Through Catherine, Heathcliff ultimately gains admittance to an otherwise peaceful home solely by his having shared her suffering. Catherine's efforts to keep him near only cultivate his wild, destructive vigor. Similarly, one discovers a fundamental mistake in reading this book not as an instructive representation of the corruption of self-absorption, but as a condemning portrait of Victorian society. This marks a difference between literature that expresses truth and literature that relies on self-expression. As argued previously, Brontë's symbolism indicates a deeper truth. However, an exploration of the alternative form of criticism serves really to bolster the novel's ultimate design.

The significance of gardening in Victorian society has been amply explored. The practice of gardening relies on a willingness to synthesize, and therefore offers an attractive solution to social inequality. In "Gertrude Jekyll and the Late-Victorian Garden Book: Representing Nature-Culture Relations", Grace Kehler examines the significance of gardening in Victorian society. Kehler accentuates gardening's feminine quality, as opposed to the more masculine scientific understanding of the time, assigning it an "authority tempered by the desire for intersubjective relationships with manifold nature" (Kehler, 2007: 624). Kehler points to the way in which this intersubjectivity avoids the assumption of superiority over nature while still satisfying the desire for individual expression. Kehler writes:

If Jekyll appropriates living matter for aesthetic use in the garden, she still conceives of Nature as a force distinct from and resistant to human control. In her vision, Nature acts according to its own compulsions and agendas, which may or may not be intelligible to the human, but that possess an impressive, untameable physicality and that manifest Nature's independent status and even evolutionary purpose or mindfulness (Kehler, 2007: 627).

Gardening, therefore, takes into consideration both nature's unattainable self-containment and its primal force, seeking to synthesize it with the human consciousness and desire for assertion.

Jekyll's work, like Wordsworth's poem, drive at a delicate balance of humanity's place in nature—taking excursions into nature in order to return to the community—and yet the tendency to want more, which Wordsworth finds in the human consciousness, remains. Towards the end of her article, Kehler posits: “Of equal importance, [Jekyll's] proliferating observations attest to the multifariousness of the biotic world that eludes human comprehension and... precedes and informs her artistry, the artistry of gardening and writing, both of which derive from multiplied moments of observation and underscore the temporal, unfinished activity of creation” (Kehler, 2007: 629). This very subtle difference in approach results in a drastically different outcome. Kehler reads according to preconceived evolutionary principles, asserting an underlying impossibility of completion at the heart of creative endeavor. With this notion in mind, critics often require of books the implicit failures of human society. Literary criticism becomes an evolutionary force of change, bent on continually correction of societal flaws, even while undermining the sole means by which those flaws might be finally corrected. Recall the bent boughs of the yew-tree in Wordsworth's poem. Gardening, therefore, becomes a means of domestic equality and a rebellious subversion of oppressive forces. The symbolic import it produces gets trampled down.

The scientific pursuit of biology, which gained long strides in the Victorian period through the work of Charles Darwin, naturally does not articulate a limit to human development. Yet with this promise follows a very violent ghost not previously found in the natural setting. In *The Origin of Species*, Darwin writes:

We behold the face of nature bright with gladness, we often see superabundance of food; we do not see or we forget, that the birds which are idly singing round us mostly live on insects or seeds, and are thus constantly destroying life; or we forget how largely these songsters, or their eggs, or their nestlings, are destroyed by birds and beasts of prey (Darwin, 2003: 62).

Darwin reminds his readers, intent on cultivating their gardens, that the greater garden of nature which cultivates itself does so through countless

acts of violence and destruction. His subversion of the illusory nature-as-garden results in the subsequent destruction of nature's symbolic possibilities. Humanity, at last, can wholly enter the natural setting, but only upon sacrificing the very qualities that made it desirable. Likewise, the distinction between feminine gardening and masculine science becomes blurred and ultimately untraceable. One is left in darkness; the lights of sun and hearth are put out.

Indeed, the difference of approach rests solely on one's aesthetic perception applied to literary interpretation. George Levine, in his celebration of Darwinism entitled "Reflections on Darwin and Darwinizing", indicates a resemblance of Darwin's work to the epic poems which preceded him, pointing out that "[t]he fact that Darwin carried with him on the *Beagle* not only Lyell but Milton carries symbolic weight" (Levine, 2009: 224). This observation ties the biologist to the practice of garden writing lauded in Kehler's article. Levine sets out to emphasize exactly Darwin's literary side, and thus the aesthetic that follows with it. Levine even highlights the Gothic implications of Darwin's discoveries through John Ruskin's reaction to the theory: "Flowers for Ruskin were beautiful *for* humans; flowers for Darwin were means of reproduction for plants: the beautiful becomes a tool of the sexual...Ruskin's horror at the idea that sexuality was at the root of art...gets to the core of fundamental Victorian concerns with the aesthetic" (Levine, 2009: 236).

Following Levine's thought to its conclusion, however, certainly justifies Ruskin's horror. Critics like John Ruskin were not surprised to discover violence or sexuality in nature. The discovery itself does nothing to mar the ideal. However, the denial of nature's representative qualities and the loss of a symbolic aesthetic in art does injury to the human being who stands to benefit from the art. As Ruskin makes clear in his writings, he never doubts the significance of a representative aesthetic and finds cause to labor in his prose towards an understanding of its meaning. He does not seem to feel a threat to the truth itself, but rather to the person who fails to see it. Ruskin argues:

But accurately speaking, no good work whatever can be perfect, and *the demand for perfection is always a sign of a misunderstanding of the ends of art*. This for two reasons, both based on everlasting laws. The first, that no great man ever stops working till he has reached his point of failure... The second reason is, that imperfection is in some sort essential to all that we know of life...that the law of human life may be Effort, and the law of human judgment, Mercy (Ruskin, 2009: 48-49).

Incompletion not only defines but contributes to the representative aesthetic. Cultural criticism, in an effort to correct and control the failures of the

past, often misses the ultimate success of the past's representative literature. With an eye on an illusory paradise, like the one Heathcliff sees through the window, such readings attempt to identify and tear down exclusive boundaries perceived in the text. The result is an actual failure, seen in Heathcliff's character, of the boundary between a creative man and destructive animal. Alternatively, nature's representative imagery, when read as a representation, indicates an ideal and provides a viable aesthetic.

Catherine's and Heathcliff's efforts to cheat representation result in the destruction of a final boundary, which Brontë explores throughout the novel's entire scope. The desire for inclusion in perceived exclusivities takes on greater significance in its application to death. The initial wild, Gothic sensation produced in the reader begins with a haunting in Lockwood's dream during his stay at Wuthering Heights. Prevented from returning to Thrushcross Grange by a snowstorm, Lockwood spends the night in Heathcliff's house and dreams he is visited by Catherine's ghost. Significantly, the ghost approaches his bed from outside a window and, when she breaks the window and seizes Lockwood's arm, a struggle ensues. Lockwood narrates: "Terror made me cruel; and finding it useless to attempt shaking the creature off, I pulled its wrist on to the broken pane, and rubbed it to and fro till the blood ran down and soaked the bedclothes: still it wailed, 'Let me in!' and maintained its tenacious gripe, almost maddening me with fear" (Brontë, 2007: 56). Lockwood's cruel efforts to keep the ghost out signify the violence implicit in domestication, as safety is inevitably exclusive. Heathcliff's reaction to the Linton family, seen through a window, is explained by this cruel exclusion.

The creation of the ghost in the text, in turn, is explained by Catherine's relationship to Heathcliff, whose name implies direct association with wild nature. "I cannot express it", Catherine explains, "but surely you and everybody have a notion that there is or should be an existence of yours beyond you. What were the use of my creation if I were entirely contained here?" (Brontë, 2007: 103). Catherine expresses, clearly enough, a desire for an existence greater or more significant than what she feels in life. Her whole being feels outside, looking in. Speaking to Heathcliff later in the novel, Catherine reiterates this desire in relation to haunting: "I'll not lie there by myself; they may bury me twelve feet deep, and throw the church down over me; but I won't rest till you are with me—I never will!" (Brontë, 2007: 141). Catherine again asserts an identity beyond herself, a perfect union of safety and liberty in the grave, an assertion which Heathcliff accomplishes by imitating the inimitability of nature. Both seek their ideal in life, ignoring the representative quality of the imagery they employ. Thus, the Gothic violence in the novel originates not only from the constraint of domestication, but from the will of the human individual to be its own self-

contained domestication beyond the boundaries it perceives already in place. For this reason, the two central characters of the novel exist in a state perpetually invading and destroying the inherent boundaries of human existence, an action pantomimed by Catherine's ghost in Lockwood's dream.

Also for this reason, the final barrier which Heathcliff must break is the grave. Death stands as the ultimate success of nature's force, both representative and quite real. Heathcliff accomplishes his destruction of its walls quite literally, as he explains:

I'll tell you what I did yesterday! I got the sexton, who was digging Linton's grave, to remove the earth off [Catherine's] coffin lid, and I opened it. I thought, once, I would have stayed there, when I saw her face again—it is her yet—he had hard work to stir me; but he said it would change if the air blew on it, and so I struck one side of the coffin loose and covered it up—not Linton's side, damn him! I wish he'd been soldered in lead—and I bribed the sexton to pull it away, when I'm laid there, and slide mine out too. I'll have it made so, and then, by the time Linton gets to us, he'll not know which is which! (Brontë, 2007: 271).

Heathcliff's vision of death bears a significant distinction from Catherine's. Because of his association with nature, Heathcliff has no desire to exist beyond himself, but only to be united in the physical grave to the woman with which he identifies himself. Where Catherine's desire for Heathcliff inspires haunting, Heathcliff's passion pursues unity in death and a resultant resolution. In the same way nature, though it destroys, maintains a sense of peace to the human who perceives it. Yet this is a peace for nature, not for the human being. Heathcliff's example makes the reader strongly aware of the inherent morbidity that results from mankind's perfect inclusion in nature. Brontë's text powerfully outlines the terrifying ghost behind evolutionary theory and the subversion of humanity's confounded posture in the natural setting.

### Conclusions

Brontë's novel concludes with an image of death decidedly hindered by the anxiety of haunting. At the end of the novel, Nelly, the narrator of Heathcliff's story, speaks to Lockwood of shutting up the house at Wuthering Heights now that it is vacated: "'For the use of such ghosts as choose to inhabit it' [Lockwood] observed. 'No, Mr. Lockwood', said Nelly, shaking her head. 'I believe the dead are at peace, but it is not right to speak of them with levity'" (Brontë, 2007: 312). Nelly's caution in speaking of the dead undermines her assertion of their final peace, especially considering Heathcliff's denial of heaven near the end of his life: "I have nearly attained *my* heaven, and that of others is altogether unvalued and uncoveted by me!"

(Brontë, 2007: 309). It is significant to recall his previous declaration from outside the Linton window that, were he and Catherine inside that space, they should have thought themselves in heaven. Throughout the novel, Heathcliff works to remove the exclusivity of the Linton's domestic splendor. He does this by wielding the destructive power of nature against the Linton's domestic containment and establishing himself in its place. Where Heathcliff fails, however, nature finally succeeds in his death and the question of the place he inhabits after death remains conspicuously left open. In response to this grim anti-aesthetic, Brontë's Gothic novel subtly submits the incomplete garden of nature, bending all of her symbolism gently towards the inherent virtue of humility and common sense. The garden represents to us our own human limitations—the only truly satisfactory aesthetic.

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